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102. Letter From the Ambassador to the United Arab Republic (Battle) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot)¹

Cairo, October 27, 1964.

Dear Phil:

I did not want to let Ridge Knight's letter and memorandum of October 16² go by without some comment.

I think Ridge's basic thesis is right. The United States is apparently a helpless witness to Israel's inexorable drive not only to gain full sovereignty over the demilitarized zones but to "remilitarize" them. Therefore we get bogged down in details — "Black lines," "Brown lines," etc. — and end up assisting the Israelis in a process which is a clear violation of the letter and spirit of the Armistice Agreement and of the UN Charter. What should add to the Syrians' apprehensions re Israel intentions and latent U.S. support for them is the fact that the Israelis in 1955 possessed themselves of the Nitzana demilitarized zone on the Egyptian-Israel armistice line and now operate that region in fee simple with none to protest the presence of Israel armed forces there.

We are unable to persuade Israel to return to the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission so we get directly involved in the details of General Odd Bull's informal negotiations with the parties. We have been unable to persuade the Israelis to withdraw their unilateral denunciation of the Egyptian-Israel Armistice Agreement so we involve ourselves in the details of financing and administering the United Nations Emergency Force.

We are unable to formalize the international community's very real interest in Jerusalem. Under Israeli pressure, we have now removed the designation "Jerusalem, Palestine" from our directories. Maybe this was the right thing to do. Maybe Jerusalem will just disappear. Maybe the next change in the Foreign Service List will be to call Israel-occupied Jerusalem "East Tel Aviv."

We are unable to obtain Israel compliance with UN resolutions calling for the repatriation and compensation of the [Page 232] refugees. Therefore we natter at UNRWA to prune its lists and cut expenses and keep reminding the Arab host governments that it is American bounty that keeps the unfortunate refugees alive.

The above picture is not very pleasant. It is compounded by the fact that Israel and its friends in the United States have been able to establish widespread credence in an upside-down world where Syria is the trigger happy party in the demilitarized zones, Nasser is dedicated to the destruction of "peace-loving" Israel, and the plight of the Arab refugees is somehow the fault of the Arab host governments.

All the above is said neither in sorrow nor in anger. I don't think it is realistic to expect the United States suddenly after sixteen years to gain the capability to reverse any of these situations. To the contrary, I think we should probably take some pride in that despite these handicaps we have not only kept the peace in this area but have also managed to contain Soviet influence

and to pump out nearly a billion dollars a year in petroleum revenues.

I do, however, go along with Ridge's thought that our preoccupation with trees often obscures the forest. **The fact is that Israel's interests (as determined by Israel) do not at all times and in all respects coincide with those of the United States. This is neither abnormal nor wicked. Perhaps we should strengthen our efforts to bring this fact to the attention of Americans.** It was Thomas Jefferson, I believe, who in a little document proclaimed on July 4, 1776 said something like this: "Let facts be submitted to a candid world."

How do we do this? A number of suggestions come to mind. Perhaps some well-known journalists could be persuaded that there is a story behind some of the aspects of the Palestine problem and UN and other efforts to keep the peace. Rick Smith, the Cairo correspondent of *The New York Times*, tells us he has been commissioned to write a piece for the Sunday Magazine about the Palestine refugees to be run at about the time the UNRWA debate takes place in New York. We intend to give him every assistance. Perhaps other American correspondents in the area or in Washington would be interested in writing pieces about the demilitarized zones, the operations of UNTSO and the Mixed Armistice Commissions, etc. More importantly, however, it seems to me that it would be useful if some leading American legislators from states where there is little involvement in the Arab-Israel dispute were to take an interest in the Palestine situation and make speeches about the issues and their effect on the totality of U.S. interests in this area. Candidates for this type of exercise who come quickly to mind are Senators Fulbright, Church, and Monroney.

The Arab-Israel area has been relatively free over the past few years of clashes and incidents of the magnitude [Page 233] which grab headlines on a continuing basis at home. This is, of course, a good thing as it demonstrates the effectiveness of our policies. At the same time it has meant that the field has been left fairly clear for special pleaders. This, I think, we should try to remedy.

Sincerely yours,

Luke

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1. Source: National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1964–66, POL 32–1 ISR–SYR. Secret; Limit Distribution; Official–Informal. Copies were sent to Ambassadors Knight, Barnes, Barbour, Meyer, and Strong, and to Davies and Consul General Wilson in Jerusalem. A handwritten note on the letter states that a reply was drafted on November 6. The reply has not been found.↵
 2. Knight's October 16 memorandum on the subject "Syrian-Israeli Confrontation in the Demilitarized Zones," attached to a letter to Talbot of the same date, argued that Israel was "seeking with unflinching persistence and tenacity to extend its sovereignty to the demilitarized zones" and that the United States was constantly trying to restrain Arab reactions against Israeli actions and was consequently too bogged down in details to do all that it could to restrain Israel. (Ibid.)↵